



# Emotional Complexities of Neurodivergence in D.S Walker's Novel *Delightfully Different*

R. Rachel Glory<sup>1</sup> & Dr. M. Mary Neena<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of English (AIDED), Nirmala College for Women (A), Coimbatore  
Affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English (AIDED), Nirmala College for Women (A), Coimbatore  
Affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore



Manuscript ID:  
BIJ-SPL2-NOV25-MD-163

Subject: English

Received : 31.07.2025  
Accepted : 24.10.2025  
Published : 14.11.2025

DOI: 10.64938/bijsi.v10si2.25.Nov163

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## Abstract

*D.S. Walker is a registered nurse with over 25 years of experience and a deep interest in sensory processing challenges associated with Asperger's Syndrome. Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is characterized by social difficulties, strict routines, limited interests, and repetitive behaviours like hand-flapping. This paper analyses the emotional complexities of Mia Lung, a girl with Asperger's syndrome shifting away from stereotypical representations of Asperger's syndrome to analyse her genuine experiences and navigating emotions in a neurotypical society that often misunderstands her. Mia Lung's experience transcends mere difference, revealing deep emotional depth and resilience. Notable aspects of her emotional experience are explored, starting with the constant misinterpretation of her behaviours by others, which leads to isolation and frustration. Mia lung's dependence on predictable routines as a fundamental coping mechanism, offering her with stability in an overstimulating environment and also exploring the complexities of her family dynamics. Mia Lung's understanding of herself and becomes stronger over time. Her feelings may not follow what is seen as "normal," but they are still real and meaningful. By focusing on Mia's point of view, people with Asperger's syndrome (a form of autism) have deep emotions too, not just simple or weak ones. Mia Lung's journey shows the importance to understand the feelings of neurodivergent people in their own way, not by comparing them to what is seen as normal. Her journey questions sterotypical ideas about autism and feelings, showing that being sensitive and staying calm are signs of strength, not weakness. This novel is a unique way of thinking about neurodivergent people, and value how they understand life.*

**Keywords:** neurodivergence, emotional complexity, autism representation, internal complexities, neurodiverse identity, disability studies, childhood neurodivergence, autistic perspective, empathy and understanding, internalized experiences.

## Introduction

D. S. WALKER has been a registered nurse for over twenty-five years and has extensively studied sensory processing issues related to Asperger's Syndrome. She lives in Honolulu, Hawaii, with her husband and two children, where she enjoys

spending time with family and friends, walking her dogs, and reading. Asperger's syndrome is a term sometimes used to describe a developmental disorder that's part of the autism spectrum disorder (ASD). People who have this type of ASD tend to have a hard time relating to others socially. They usually



stick to a very specific routine, have a narrow set of interests, and act in repetitive ways such as flapping their hands. D.S. Walker's novel *Delightfully Different* shows Mia Lung, a neurodivergent girl whose strong feelings are often misunderstood by others. Mia Lung's emotional experiences and shows that neurodivergent childhood is not lacking, but just different and equally important. Instead of treating Mia Lung like a condition to be fixed, the book makes her a significant character by showing her inner world, her reaction when people misunderstand her, deals with loud places, needs routines, handles family problems, and grows as a person. When people do not understand what Mia Lung means, when they ignore her smart thoughts, when she needs schedules to feel safe, when her family struggles, and when she learns about herself, all these break the myth that autistic people do not have feelings. Using disability studies, it explains people must focus on inner feelings in these stories to fight stereotypes and help people understand better. It is not just about showing differences, it is about showing neurodivergent people as fully human. By focusing on Mia's feelings, the novel *Delightfully Different* gives a true picture of neurodivergent life.

Mia lung's journey in the novel *Delightfully Different* starts with a basic problem that is, people keep misunderstanding her. When she feels excited, upset or worried, others often get it wrong. They think her reactions are bad behaviour when she is really just struggling with too much noise or needing time to process things. This constant confusion hurts Mia Lung deeply. She has strong feelings, but people either ignore them or treat them like something is wrong with her. The book shows, when neurodivergent people show feelings differently, it can lead to loneliness. For example, when Mia stays quiet in stressful moments, she is not being rude, she is trying to cope. But people think she does not care. These misunderstandings do not just upset Mia Lung temporarily, they make her start believing something is wrong with her. It is especially hard when teachers and other adults force her to act "normal" without trying to understand her way of expressing feelings. "Mommy, I hate that Ms. Mein, and I never want to

go back there. She is really mean. She never smiles, and she hates me. I thought Mom would agree, but she didn't" (walker 57). This leaves Mia's real emotions, her fears, hopes, and sensitive side completely unseen. The novel *Delightfully Different* shows clearly how society's failure to accept different ways of expressing feelings does not just make communication hard, it actually treats Mia Lung as less than a neurotypical person. But the novel *Delightfully Different* does not just show the problem, it offers a better way to understand neurodivergent inner lives. "Autistic people may have difficulty understanding neurotypicals, just as neurotypicals may have difficulty understanding autistic people" (Milton 884). By telling the story from Mia's view, it makes readers question their own ideas about "right" ways to show feelings.

Mia's story proves her emotions are not wrong just because they look different, they are real, complicated, and deserve respect. We need better ways to understand all kinds of emotional expression, not just neurotypical ones. Through Mia's experiences, it helps the readers to see neurodivergent behaviour differently, not as mistakes needing fixing. In the end, what some might call "bad behaviour" becomes proof of human diversity, asking readers to be more understanding and kind. Mia's true emotional life is full and colourful, though hidden from view. While she may appear quiet on the outside, inside she is full of deep feelings, questions, and sharp observations about the world. This contrast shows how wrong people can be when they assume her calm face means she does not feel much. The book lets us hear Mia's internal thoughts, her happiness, worries, and smart questions about people, proving how deeply she thinks and feels.

The novel *Delightfully Different* is not just good storytelling, it is an important way to show that neurodivergent emotions are real and valuable, even if expressed differently. When things get too loud or confusing, Mia's retreat into her thoughts is not her shutting down, it is how she stays balanced and understands herself. This challenges the unfair belief that autistic people lack emotional intelligence. Mia's thoughtful nature is not a weakness, just a different



but equally important way of experiencing emotions. The novel *Delightfully Different* makes an important point by showing Mia's rich inner world, true feelings are not just about smiling or talking in expected ways. By focusing on Mia's silent but strong emotions, we should accept all kinds of emotional expression, not just familiar ones. Most of the time, Mia is a literal thinker and she finds it hard to understand the implied meaning of some sentences. "I do hope you'll keep an open mind about Kolea though. Mommy, how do I open my mind? It's in my head, right? Is there a door?" (walker 73). By accepting the differences, it does more than developing Mia's character, it shows literature can respect neurodivergent experiences without forcing them into "normal" boxes. What might look like silence or passivity is actually proof of Mia's strength and complex inner life. The book asks readers to think differently about where real emotions live, pushing us to accept more ways of being and feeling as equally valid.

Mia's routines are not just habits, they are essential tools for managing her emotions in a chaotic world. Her need for structure is not stubbornness, but a way to feel safe and in control when everything else feels overwhelming. While others might see her schedules as rigid, the book shows they are actually smart coping strategies that help her stay calm and confident. Simple, predictable patterns, like daily rituals or familiar tasks, work like emotional anchors for Mia. "For many autistic individuals, routines are not about rigidity, but rather about predictability and emotional safety" (Woods et al. 2). This understanding reframes Mia's need for routine as a method of maintaining emotional stability, not a sign of inflexibility. But when sudden changes happen, her upset is not about being difficult, it is because she truly needs order to handle all the sensory and social information. It makes clear that Mia's routines are not weaknesses but practical solutions that help her live better. Mia's experience challenges the common belief that being flexible always means being emotionally mature. What looks like inflexibility is actually her careful way of staying balanced. By showing Mia's routines with

understanding, the book explains that neurodivergent ways of staying emotionally steady are just as valid as neurotypical ones. It asks readers to think differently about what emotional health looks like, Mia's need for structure is not a problem to fix, but a personal strength that helps her thrive.

There's no single "right" way to manage emotions. Just like people are different, the ways we stay emotionally balanced differ too. Recognizing and respecting these differences is what truly makes spaces welcoming for everyone. Mia's story shows that what some might call limitations are often just different, but equally effective ways of living well.

Mia's emotional growth happens within her family, a place that is safe and sometimes difficult. While her family loves her, their neurotypical views can make it hard for them to truly understand her feelings. Her mother shows this clearly, though she cares deeply, she sometimes gets Mia's needs wrong by guessing instead of really listening. This leaves Mia feeling alone emotionally, even when her family is physically there for her. These situations force Mia to do double work, handling her own feelings while also dealing with her family's misunderstandings. When Mia shows distress in her own ways, her family often tries to "correct" her rather than understand, showing how society treats neurodivergent emotions as problems. But the novel also shows hopeful changes, as Mia's family slowly learns to respect how she communicates and what she truly feels. These positive moments prove that good support means accepting, not necessarily fully understanding. Mia's journey shows this truth, she does best when her family stops trying to control her behaviour and starts paying attention to her experiences.

The novel avoids simple good or bad family portrayals, instead showing emotional support as an ongoing learning process with both mistakes and progress. Through these family relationships, the novel *Delightfully Different* proves neurodivergent children bloom when their feelings are recognized, even if not completely grasped. As Mia's family moves from frustration to empathy, they show how change happens when neurotypical people question



their assumptions and focus on the neurodivergent person's reality. Mia's emotional journey ends with quiet but powerful growth, not by acting more "normal," but by fully accepting herself. Her real advancement comes when she learns to trust her own feelings, whether others understand them or not. This novel shows this change in small but important ways, when she asks for space, sticks to her helpful routines, or speaks up when something bothers her. Importantly, Mia does not "get better" by becoming less neurodivergent, she grows by learning to work with her unique brain. This challenges the usual idea that emotional progress means changing to fit neurotypical standards. Her mother's growth matters too. When she stops trying to control Mia and starts really listening, she creates a safe space for Mia to be herself. "What I knew was what my parents taught me: to treat others as I wanted to be treated, as the Bible said" (Walker 136). This shows that true empowerment happens when people support neurodivergent individuals as they are, not when they try to "fix" them. Mia's story proves that emotional development looks different for neurodivergent people.

She creates smart ways to handle her feelings that work for her brain, even if they look unusual to others. The novel's ending is powerful because Mia succeeds by being herself, not by pretending to be someone else. The real problem is not with neurodivergent people, it is with a society that would not accept them. The novel *Delightfully Different* does more than telling Mia's story, it shows families and communities how to truly support neurodivergent youth. The solution is not changing the person, but changing how we welcome different ways of thinking and feeling. In the end, the book gives us both a satisfying conclusion and a new way to understand what emotional success really means for people with neurodivergent brains.

## Conclusion

D.S. Walker's novel *Delightfully Different* offers a compassionate look at neurodivergent emotions through Mia's story. Rather than defining her by behaviours or labels, the book invites readers into her

rich inner world, full of deep feelings that others often miss. This analysis has explored how Mia's emotions are misunderstood by those around her, protected by her private thoughts, steadied by routines, influenced by her family, and strengthened as she learns to speak for herself. Each part of her journey reveals something new about how neurodivergent people experience emotions not as "wrong," but simply different. The novel *Delightfully Different* matters because it rejects common stereotypes about Asperger's syndrome or autism. Mia is not a problem to solve or a mystery to figure out, she is a different child who grows in her own way. Her story pushes readers to accept neurodivergent characters as they are, not try to "fix" them. *Delightfully Different* helps change how literature portrays neurodivergent lives, not as tragedies, but as valid and meaningful. The book's power comes from showing Mia as a strong person, not just "different." Traits like needing routines or being sensitive to noise are not weaknesses they are part of what makes her strong. Mia's story reminds us that emotions do not look the same for everyone, and the kindest thing we can do is trust people when they tell us how they feel. More than just a novel, *Delightfully Different* is a call to build a world that includes everyone.

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